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# SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Source: *Social Justice*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (107), Art, Identity and Social Justice (2007), pp. 1-4

Published by: [Social Justice/Global Options](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768417>

Accessed: 10/02/2014 10:22

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# Editors' Introduction: Art, Identity, and Social Justice

Emmanuel A. David and Edward J. McCaughan

**T**HIS ISSUE OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* IS THE SECOND OF TWO ON THE TOPIC THAT SEEKS TO uncover the tangled relationship between art and social change. Following the tremendous number of submissions to the first issue (Vol. 33, No. 2) on *Art, Power, and Social Change*, we organized a second focusing on the relationship between the arts, collective identity, and social justice.

The contributing authors discuss the role of various media—including the visual arts, theater, and performance—in the social justice struggles of communities as diverse as American Indians, Bahamians, North American and Mexican feminists, working-class women in England, and LGBTQ communities of color in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the authors explore the arts in a wide range of geographic locations and historical contexts, the articles in this issue on art and social justice each address identity and difference within contested relationships of power and structural inequality. Situated around various lines of identity and difference—race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation—the essays converge along thematic grounds characterized by a commitment to emancipatory struggles and progressive social change.

In our lead essay, “The Art of Social Justice,” Maria X. Martinez reminds us of the vital role played by poets such as Allen Ginsberg, performers such as Rhodessa Jones, and visual artists such as Ester Hernández in shaping the identities and political agendas of people of color and queer communities in San Francisco. Martinez also calls on political leaders to direct public funds to artists to help solve our modern urban ills. “Artists,” argues Martinez, “not only document social change; they promote, inform, and shape it.” Drawing on her many years of experience as a community activist, arts advocate, and public health worker in San Francisco, Martinez gives examples and develops one model of how government could utilize what she calls “our most creative capital”—artists and their art—to promote social justice, mitigate disparities, and build healthy neighborhoods.

Like Martinez, who argues for increased attention to the arts within public

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health communities, Victoria Foster's article, "The Art of Empathy: Employing the Arts in Social Inquiry with Poor Working-Class Women," reflects on a case study involving an arts-based research project carried out by a team of working-class women at a government-funded Sure Start program in Merseyside, U.K. Inspired by feminist participatory inquiry that seeks to reduce hierarchies between the researcher and participant, Foster explores the ways in which the arts can be employed in participatory social research as an innovative approach to generating data as well as a powerful means of disseminating research findings through community-based ethno-drama. At once a reflexive piece on the power of participatory methods, feminist research, and arts-based methodology, Foster seeks to preserve the emotion, creativity, and "voices" of the women participants as both collaborators and agents in the production of meaning.

While feminist epistemology saturates Foster's research through collaborative, arts-based methods and dissemination of findings to the community, Joanna Gardner-Huggett provides a historical account of feminist struggles in creating alternative art spaces. Gardner-Huggett's "The Women Artists' Cooperative Space as a Site for Social Change: Artemisia Gallery, Chicago (1973–1979)" is a case study of the Chicago-based Artemisia Gallery; it focuses on programming and exhibitions implemented by the collective that prepared women artists to enter the professional workforce equipped with a feminist pedagogy that could promote social justice for women in the art world. The author argues that alternative spaces such as Artemisia Gallery "attempted to arm women with the tools necessary to attack from within the institutional structures that marginalized them in the first place." Gardner-Huggett also identifies key factors in Artemisia's gradual decline, beginning in the 1980s, including the conservative political climate in the U.S. that followed Ronald Reagan's election and a "generational clash" between Artemisia's founders and younger feminists who demanded greater attention to other dimensions of oppression such as "ability, class, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexuality."

Edward J. McCaughan, in "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico," profiles six prominent Mexican feminist artists and describes the ways in which they individually and collectively traversed the contested role of the arts in the context of Mexico's post-1968 social movements. Drawing on in-depth interviews with the artists, McCaughan explores how "for more than two decades... Mexico's feminist artists have navigated an often hostile labyrinth of silence erected by the art world, the Left, and even the feminist movement itself." In response to the systematic silencing of women artists within the art academies and galleries, the male-dominated *grupos* movement of art collectives, and the contemporary Mexican feminist movements, Mexico's feminist artists resisted these structures of power by creating new collaborative practices and alternative cultural spaces. Together, feminist artists politicized the arts by unmasking notions of the body, subjectivity, and power, articulating the dualities of gender and sexuality, and contesting the highly gendered, hegemonic discourse of what it means to be Mexican.

"Postcards in the Porfirian Imaginary," by Alejandra Osorio, examines the late 19th-century origins of an imagined Mexicanness. By studying the postcard during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1911), Osorio reveals "the ways in which the mass production of a series of celebrated representations of Mexicanness established a particular imaginary around competing nationalist themes of progress and tradition." During what the author describes as the "golden age" of postcard production and consumption, two kinds of images dominated: those of exotic, "typical" Mexicans and the "pre-modern" customs of "a culture that Spanish colonialism attempted to annihilate," as well as those hailing the modernization of Mexico's infrastructure and tourist facilities. In Osorio's analysis, the postcards offered "racialized images that would have responded to two interests of the time: first, they would satisfy an interest in classifying and recognizing an indigenous 'otherness,' and, therefore, affirm the bourgeoisie who enunciated this difference from its own privileged location within a European-influenced modernity. Second, these pre-modern images would also mitigate the nostalgia for the imminent disappearance of these traditional scenes within the framework of modernization."

Struggles to control representations of indigenous American peoples are ongoing. In her article, "Hybridity as a Strategy for Self-Determination in Contemporary American Indian Art," Cynthia Fowler examines the ways in which a key group of American Indian artists have explored the postcolonial concept of hybridity in their work as a vehicle for the redefinition of themselves as individuals and their culture as a whole. Providing a general summary of hybridity as it is typically used in postcolonial theory, Fowler also considers the ways in which American Indian theorists Gerald Vizenor and Gerald McMaster have specifically applied the concept of hybridity to constructs of American Indian identity. The author suggests that artists Faye HeavyShield, Shelley Niro, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Steven Deo, and Gail Tremblay, "might be described as postindian storiers," to use Vizenor's term, "transgressing boundaries and crossing borders in their exploration of the potentiality of their identities as post-Indians."

In a different postcolonial context, Bahamian playwright, novelist, poet, and critic Ian Gregory Strachan locates the theater company he founded in 1996 within the tradition of political theater in the African Diaspora. In his eloquent and refreshingly self-critical essay, "Theater in the Bush: Art, Politics, and Community in the Bahamas," Strachan gives an account of the cultural, social, and political dynamics in his country that were the impetus for trying to create his own theater company, Track Road Theater. The piece outlines some of the challenges he and his actors and fellow writers faced as artists while trying to achieve their goal, "which was, and is, equipping the general public with more critical sensibility, promoting tolerance and democratic ideals, and eschewing political corruption and the culture of patronage." Acknowledging the limitations faced by isolated artists, Strachan argues that "writing, though an action (at times a revolutionary action), must also be

matched by other forms of people-building,” including the building of institutions. “But,” he asks, “can we build institutions—stable, sustainable institutions—that are not themselves part of the establishment?”

Amy Jo Goddard, too, traces the ways in which performance enables artists to bridge activism and cultural productions and highlights alliance building across lines of identity and difference. In “Staging Activism: New York City Performing Artists as Cultural Workers,” Goddard explores how three New York City-based artists of color—Imani Henry, Susana Cook, and Diyaa Mildred Gerestant—who identify as queer or lesbian, infuse activism into gender performances, both on stage through cultural work that critiques gender binaries and enacts (female) masculinity, and off stage in their everyday lives through solidarity work. Goddard believes that the work of these artists reflects the worlds inhabited by their audiences—“social activists, gender and sexual minorities, outsiders, and people with low or fixed income”—worlds quite different from those addressed by “many mainstream performing arts programs and Broadway theater.”

We conclude with a piece that traces the emergence of LGBTQ hip-hop, or “homo-hop,” and locates its influences in the Black Literary Arts movements of the 1980s. In “Post-Pomo Hip-Hop Homos: Hip-Hop Art, Gay Rappers, and Social Change,” D. Mark Wilson presents a social history of the Deep Dick Collective (D/DC, also spelled Deep Dickollective), a crew of African American gay men, that draws upon artistic formations of black gay identity, resists homophobia within the hip-hop genre through various celebrations of social difference, and makes a spirited call for a global “queer” political activism. “When it comes to social justice within African American and LGBTQ communities,” writes Wilson, “there are same-gender loving, ‘queer’ kids of color in neighborhoods, ghettos, slums, and in gang and military war zones throughout the world, wondering if there is a political community who will fight for them.” Wilson sees D/DC’s work as a challenge to “other progressive movements to reflect critically upon the identities and social realities of people they would rather not see.”